

Andover College Graduation Address

Saturday, June 3, 2006 2pm

Portland Exposition Center, Portland, Maine

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Good afternoon members of the Class of 2006. I am truly honored to be here with you to celebrate your graduation from Andover College. You have reached a major milestone in your life. Congratulations! Well done. Thanks to those who encouraged or helped you. Enjoy this moment and let it soak completely into your heart and mind. Some day you may remember this accomplishment to gain strength in adversity.

You took many steps to get here. You will continue to climb higher from this success, because you have a solid foundation to build on. But soon you will be flung back into the sea of life, where the waves rock hard and soft, where winds and currents change your course. How will you find your way? What will you do when the wind dies? How will you respond to others caught in a storm? My hope is that you will chart a new course for changes in the sea, that you will row toward your goals when the wind dies, and that you will help at least one fellow traveler along the way, giving something back to a world that needs you.

Today you enter one of the most challenging stages of life, when you want to use your degree in a specific, rewarding career. Happily for some, that first job is ready. Others will need more time. I know this difficult stage because my children are going through it, and my own struggles come back to me with them. Remember the fable of the rabbit and the tortoise: you will reach your next goal if you just keep moving toward it. Some of you may have returned to college after caring for an aging grandparent, or focusing on your children. Others may take time out to meet such family challenges. My personal experience confirms that you too will reach your goals if you keep on course. Every path has bends and turns: even if you sit down for a while you can reach your destination if you get back up to move along your charted course again.

All of us grow as we journey through life. All face challenges and obstacles that stop us for a while. Believe in your strengths, the attributes you used to claim this achievement today. We all have weaknesses: you overcome them with your strengths. We all stumble from time to time: just pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and find a way around any boulder in your path. Use some of the wisdom and skill you learned while you were a student at Andover. We all need a helping hand now and then: don't be afraid to call on someone when you really need it, and don't forget that you have something that could help another person. No doubt you learned it while you were at Andover. We can't be a community without participation from each of us.

In the end, people will measure you by your success, not by the valleys you had to cross. If you work to your strengths as you plan, and adapt to new conditions, you can achieve anything. The qualities that helped you succeed at Andover will continue to provide you well. Why, in today's changing world, your final career path may not yet be invented! Margaret Meade once said, "Never doubt that a small, group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." There's no reason you can't be one of those world changers. Just remember, you may have to row!